

Download the 50 Core American Documents e-book from the Ashbrook Center

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Our nation depends on inspired citizens and politicians who grasp the true meaning of liberty and American politics. People who look beyond the "textbook answers" and learn from first-hand accounts of the great minds and original, primary documents that shaped this country.

In 1825, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson discussed by letter the kinds of texts that should be required reading at the recently founded university in Virginia. "It is certainly very material that the true doctrines of liberty, as exemplified in our Political System, should be inculcated on those who are to sustain and may administer it," Madison wrote. "It is, at the same time," he continued, "not easy to find standard books that will be both guides & guards for the purpose."

We couldn't agree more.

The Ashbrook Center has compiled 50 Core Documents meant to fulfill those same purposes, conveniently packaged in eBook format. This list is meant to affirm the value and usefulness of reading original documents (as opposed to textbook summaries of major issues), and to introduce readers to America's story as it has unfolded from the American Founding into the 20th Century. Each document tells us something important about the "American mind," to borrow a term from Thomas Jefferson's 1825 letter to Henry Lee; in other words, they reveal a certain turn of each author's thought about the basic principles of economic, religious, or political liberty.

The 50 Core Documents:

- emphasize America's uniqueness and contributions to the world**
- present different views on some of the major issues and disputes in American history and government.**
- invites teachers, students, and citizens into an unfolding American political dialogue**

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